

undermine U.S. interests across the globe without fear of an American reprisal. The Soviets didn't need to use their nuclear weapons in order to achieve results; the mere fact that it had nuclear weapons dramatically increased both its strategic power and its leverage over foreign policy and, to some extent, over the United States.

The same would be true if Iran acquired nuclear weapons. Even if the mullahs never actually detonated a nuclear bomb, their acquisition of a nuclear capability would forever change Iran's regional and global influence, and it would certainly forever change the Middle East. If Iran went nuclear, its neighbors—thinking particularly of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey—might feel compelled to pursue their own nuclear arsenals. Tehran could easily trigger a dangerous chain reaction of nuclear proliferation. Once they had nuclear weapons, the Iranians would be much more aggressive in supporting terrorist organizations that are killing even American troops, for example, in Iraq. The Iranians would also ramp up their support for Hezbollah and Hamas and possibly provide them with nuclear materials. They would be emboldened to conduct economic warfare against the West, for example, by disrupting oil shipments traveling through the Straits of Hormuz. Iran would also be more confident about expanding its footprint in Latin America, where it has established a close working relationship with Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez. Governments around the world would lose faith in America's reliability as a strategic partner. U.S. credibility would be irrevocably weakened.

Remember, this is not the worst-case scenario. We are assuming that a self-preservation instinct would dissuade the Iranians from ever launching nuclear weapons against our allies or even the United States. But then again, is this really a safe assumption? Iranian leader Ahmadinejad has repeatedly expressed his desire to destroy the State of Israel, and given his radical, millenarian religious views and the viciously anti-Semitic ideology espoused by the Iranian theocracy, we can't simply dismiss the idea that Iran would attack Israel with nuclear weapons.

Because the United Nations took so long to act and because its sanctions are relatively weak, there is also the possibility, as the Jerusalem Post pointed out in an article entitled "Too Little, Too Very Late," that U.N. sanctions could lull the international community into a false sense of security. That is where the action we take today could really help.

Here is what the Post wrote:

Breaking and evading these sanctions—

Talking about the U.S. sanctions—

ought to be a breeze for Ahmadinejad. A full year after Iran's deceptive elections, which spurred countrywide demonstrations, he may be less popular but his position is stable. After the regime brutally quashed his opposition, it is very doubtful that stunted sanc-

tions will destabilize his hold on power. . . . [The U.N.] sanctions . . . are not the antidote to the Iranian nuclear threat that Israel had hoped for and that the free world so badly needs. In some ways, they may even exacerbate Israel's predicament. They will lend the appearance of an international mobilization to curb Iran's nuclear weapons ambitions, but in actuality will achieve nothing—the worst of all worlds.

That is why I think the United States separate sanctions authorized by the legislation we will vote on shortly are so important to come in behind the United Nations sanctions and what the European Union might do to supplement those actions in a way that will truly be meaningful.

Finally, I want to note something that, frankly, is as important as everything else I have said and should be seen as part and parcel to our action in adopting this sanctions legislation. It has nothing to do with nuclear weapons, but it has everything to do with human rights. We need to make it very clear to the Iranian people that we care about them, we care about their aspirations for more freedom, for more representative government, and for the ability to take advantage of the opportunities their country should be presenting for them.

We can help the people of Iran achieve those aspirations by putting pressure on the people who prevent that from occurring, the regime in Tehran, the mullah-led government. These sanctions can have an impact on those mullahs and, in turn, help the Iranian people achieve their goals.

We need to be lending moral and rhetorical support to the Iranian activists. These are the people who poured into the streets last summer in protest of a fraudulent election. Just as we championed the cause of Soviet and Eastern European dissidents during the Cold War, I believe we should promote the efforts of Iranian freedom fighters and, frankly, shine a spotlight on the regime's brutal repression. That can be done especially through the McCain provisions that are part of the Iran sanctions legislation we are considering.

Had the United Nations imposed strong sanctions on Iran a long time ago when it was first found to be in violation of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, I would be more optimistic about our chances of success. Iran's economy would have been under severe strain for an extended period, and the government would have had fewer resources to fund its nuclear program and less power to repress its people.

As I said, there is still time, and because we are able to approve this conference report today and send it to the President for his signature, we are able to add to the sanctions that the rest of the world is willing to impose in such a way as to not only have an opportunity to dissuade the Iranian leaders from pursuing their nuclear program but, as I said, just as importantly, to demonstrate to the Iranian people we

aim to support them in their quest for greater freedom.

So I hope my colleagues will send a very strong message with a unanimous vote for the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2009. I hope the President will sign this legislation immediately and begin to implement its provisions.

Mr. President, there is a long list of folks to thank: Representatives BERMAN and HARMAN and CANTOR in the House of Representatives are just some who come to mind; Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator BAYH, colleagues in the Senate; the leaders, Leader REID and Leader MCCONNELL, who have worked to bring this report to us for a vote today in an expedited way. I think this is a very good example of cooperation both between the House and the Senate and between Democrats and Republicans to accomplish something that is not just good for the people of the United States of America but people around the world—in the Middle East, and in particular the people of Iran.

So I urge my colleagues to unanimously support the conference report when we have an opportunity to vote on it shortly.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I rise today in strong support of the conference report for the Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act.

First, I would like to commend Senator DODD for putting forth a comprehensive plan to arm the administration with the tools they need to put a stop to Iran's rogue nuclear program.

I believe when it comes to Iran, we should never take the military option off the table. But I have long argued that economic sanctions are the preferred and probably the most effective way to choke Iran's nuclear ambitions.

The Obama administration initiated direct diplomatic negotiations with Iran, but that government, led by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, stubbornly refused to suspend their nuclear program despite President Obama's genuine attempts at diplomacy.

Iran's nuclear weapons program represents a severe threat to American national interests because their acquisition of nuclear weapons could lead to the proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout the Middle East and beyond, ending any hopes for a nuclear weapons-free world.

Make no mistake, a nuclear Iran would be destabilizing to its neighbors, encourage terrorism against the United States and Israel, and the risk of both conventional and nuclear war in the Middle East would rise considerably.